

**Darius in Place of Cyrus:
The First Edition of Deutero-Isaiah (Isaiah 40.1–52.12)
in 521 BCE***

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Abstract

It can be called a scholarly consensus that the salvific king announced in Deutero-Isaiah is to be identified with the Persian emperor Cyrus. According to this opinion most of the book emerged before Cyrus' victory over the Neo-Babylonian empire in 539 BCE. But a closer reading reveals that only one of the royal oracles names Cyrus explicitly (Isa. 44.24–45.7), whereas three remain anonymous (45.5-7; 45.11-13*; 48.12-15). Recent studies on the redactional history of the book agreed that its first edition was written around 520 BCE. The present article points out that such an edition can be understood much better if we apply the anonymous oracles to Darius, who usurped the Persian throne in 522 and captured the revolting city of Babylon in winter 522 and summer 521 BCE.

The mention of the Persian king Cyrus in Isa. 44.28 and 45.1 is one of the main reasons why that part of the book of Isaiah, from ch. 40 onwards, cannot be derived from the prophet of the eighth century BCE, but must have been written by an anonymous exilic writer whom we call 'Deutero-Isaiah'. It also afforded a reason for dating the book of Deutero-Isaiah, since Bernhard Duhm assigned chs. 40–55¹ to the years before

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1. Cf. B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja* (HK, 3.1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 5th edn, 1968 [1892]), pp. 14-15. R.J. Coggins, 'Do We Still Need Deutero-Isaiah?',

Cyrus conquered the Neo-Babylonian empire in 539 BCE, and localized it to Babylonia.²

However, this traditional view cannot be taken for granted any longer. Especially during the last decade, scholars have been questioning nearly all the elements of it: Hans Barstad has convincingly demonstrated how unfounded the arguments are that have led to the assumption that the book had to be written in Babylonia.³ Statements such as the demand on the exiles to leave Babylonia in Isa. 52.11, taking into account the specific formulation *סֹרְרוּ סֹרְרוּ צֵאוּ מִשָּׁם* ('Depart, depart, go out from there!'), lead one to suspect rather a Palestinian origin.⁴ Moreover, recently, more and more scholars⁵ have doubted the traditional assumption that the whole

JSOT 80 (1998), pp. 77-92, has radically questioned this literary unit and its supposed prophetic author, but failed to offer any better hypothesis.

2. This traditional view is still held by C. Westermann, *Das Buch Jesaja. Kapitel 40–66* (ATD, 19; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 5th edn, 1986), pp. 11-28. Only the Servant Songs (Isa. 42.1-4; 49.1-6; 50.4-9; 52.13–53.12), the polemics against the idols (40.19-20 + 41.6-7; 42.17; 44.9-20; 45.16-17.20b; 46.5-8) and some admonitions (such as 44.21, 22b; 45.9-10; 48.1*, 4, 5b, 7b, 8-10, 18-19) are regarded as later additions.

3. H.M. Barstad, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Book of Isaiah: 'Exilic' Judah and Provenance of Isaiah 40–55* (The Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, Series B, 102; Oslo: Novus forlag, 1997), pp. 35-75. Cf. already C.R. Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny: The Development of the Book of Isaiah; A Reassessment of Isaiah 36–39* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 205-207; P.R. Davies, 'God of Cyrus, God of Israel: Some Religio-Historical Reflections on Isaiah 40–55', in J. Davies *et al.* (eds.), *Words Remembered, Texts Renewed: Essays in Honour of John F.A. Sawyer* (JSOTSup, 195; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 207-25 (210-15).

4. Cf. H.M. Barstad, 'Lebte Deuterocesaja in Judäa?', in H.M. Barstad and S.A. Christoffersen (eds.), *Veterotestamentica. Donum Natalicium Aruido S. Kapelrud a collegis et amicis XIV lustra complenti* (NTT, 83.2; Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1982), pp. 77-87 (86). Although he weakened the argument in his recent book (*Babylonian Captivity*, p. 65 n. 10), emphasizing now the fictive character of the text, the thesis will become stronger again if we reckon with a more concrete message, as in the recent redaction-critical investigations (see n. 6).

5. Cf. H.-J. Hermisson, 'Einheit und Komplexität Deuterocesajas. Probleme der Redaktionsgeschichte von Jes 40–44' (1989), in *idem*, *Studien zur Prophetie und Weisheit. Gesammelte Aufsätze* (FAT, 23; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1998), pp. 132-57; O.H. Steck, 'Israel und Zion: Zum Problem konzeptioneller Einheit und literarischer Schichtung in Deuterocesaja', in *idem*, *Gottesknecht und Zion* (FAT, 4; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), pp. 173-207; R.G. Kratz, *Kyros im Deuterocesaja-Buch* (FAT, 1; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1991); J. van Oorschot, *Von Babel zum Zion. Eine literarkritische und redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (BZAW, 206; Berlin: W. de Gruyter,

book could be dated in the period before 539. In contrast, they reconstruct a long redactional history of the book, which—although still starting in the years before 539—runs down to the late sixth, fifth, or even fourth century.⁶ But if the book of Deutero-Isaiah came into being through a longer historical process and was edited in some shape after its author or authors had already returned from Babylonia to Judah, then the traditional assumption that its message is only focussed on Cyrus, who had died already in 530 BCE, is much less convincing. Instead, we become aware of the fact that apart from the central royal oracle, which names Cyrus explicitly (Isa. 44.24–45.7), there are three other royal oracles in the book (42.5–7; 45.11–13*; 48.12–15), which remain anonymous. Thus, the question is raised: Are we really entitled to apply them all to the same person, or will we secure a better interpretation of the texts if we let them refer to different Persian emperors?

1. *The Historical Background*

Regarding the historical events in the year 539 BCE, we must admit that the prophecy of Deutero-Isaiah and his disciples largely failed.⁷ Babylon was not conquered and destroyed as they had announced (Isa. 47), but

1993); Ulrich Berges, *Das Buch Jesaja. Komposition und Endgestalt* (HBS, 16; Freiburg: Herder, 1998); J. Werlitz, *Redaktion und Komposition. Zur Rückfrage hinter die Endgestalt von Jesaja 40–55* (BBB, 122; Berlin: Philo, 1999).

6. Davies, 'God of Cyrus, God of Israel', pp. 216–20, has argued for a dating of the entire book in the fifth century.

7. That Deutero-Isaiah is to be regarded as a prophetic group, probably founded by a master who shaped the specific language of the book, is suggested by several observations. First, the basic instruction to console the people and Jerusalem (Isa. 40.1–2) is in the plural (cf. 48.20). Second, Isa. 40.1–8 does not speak about the vocation of an individual prophet: the structure of the text differs from call narratives like Jer. 1.4–10. Verses 6 and 8 seem to be later additions (that v. 7 is lacking in the LXX can be explained as a dittography and a gloss), and the reading of the verb *אָמַרְתִּי* in the first person singular in v. 6 ('I said, "What shall I cry?") in the LXX and 1QIsa^a is not confirmed by the MT, which reads the third person. Third, Isa. 50.4–9 seems to reveal the experiences of a prophetic individual, but defining himself as like the disciples (*לַמּוֹדִים*), he refers to a prophetic group (cf. Isa. 8.16). Cf. already D. Michel, 'Das Rätsel Deuterjesaja', in *idem, Studien zur Überlieferungsgeschichte alttestamentlicher Texte* [TB, 93; Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1997], pp. 199–218 (216–17) (an article first published in *Theologia Viatorum* 13 [1977], pp. 115–32); and my *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period* (2 vols.; London: SCM Press, 1994), II, pp. 414–15; for recent discussion see Werlitz, *Redaktion und Komposition*, pp. 106–10.

Cyrus entered the Babylonian capital peacefully and was welcomed as liberator by the majority of its population; moreover, Babylon was honoured by becoming one of the four residences of the Persian empire. The victory of Cyrus did not lead to the universal acknowledgment of Yhwh as the prophetic group had hoped (45.5-7); instead, Cyrus presented himself in Babylon as appointee and faithful worshiper of Marduk.⁸ However the historicity of the Cyrus edict might be judged, it does not seem to have much effect for the Judaeen minority in Babylonia.⁹ Cyrus' full interest was engaged upon the eastern part of his empire; and as far as we can see from his inscription, his measures for rebuilding and repopulation were restricted to the devastated area of the eastern and northeastern part of Mesopotamia towards the modern border on Iran.¹⁰ Perhaps he gave back some cult objects which were deported by Nebuchadnezzar from Jerusalem, when he put the Babylonian temples in order (Ezra 1.7-8). But as far as we can see, there was no large return of Judaeen exiles to Judah and no beginning of reconstruction before the year 520 BCE—that is, 18 years after the end of the Neo-Babylonian empire. By this time, Cyrus, on whom Deutero-Isaiah and his disciples had pinned all their hopes initially, had already been dead for 10 years. Thus, they had to struggle with the problem that the main elements of their prophecy were not confirmed by God.

The Persian emperor who supported the return of the exiles and the reconstruction of their homeland was Darius. For Darius, who had usurped the throne after the murder of Gaumāta, the resettlement of the Judaeen minority was one instrument of stabilizing his power. Confronted with a wave of rebellions in the central and eastern part of his empire, especially in Babylonia, Darius was interested in establishing a loyal group at its southwestern border that would help him to secure the routes to Egypt. If we take into account not only that the Judaeen remigration group was led by the heads of the two leading families, Zerubbabel, the grandson of the last Davidic king Jehoiachin, and Joshua, the grandson of the last chief priest Seraiah, but that the former bore even the official Persian title *šar-pa* ('governor', Ezra 6.7; Hag. 1.1, 14; 2.2, 21), then we can be sure that some kind of official negotiation between the Judaeen exiles and the Persian government must have taken place, in which the arrangement for the repatriation was made. These could most likely have taken place during the

8. Cf. Cyrus-Cylinder I, 11-12 (*ANET*, pp. 315-16).

9. Cf. my historical reconstruction in R. Albertz, *Die Exilszeit. 6. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (Biblische Enzyklopädie, 7; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2001), pp. 97-112.

10. Cf. Cyrus Cylinder I, 31-32 (*ANET*, p. 316).

first half of the year 521, when Darius stayed in Babylon in order to suppress the rebellion of Nidintu-Bēl, after he had captured the city in December 522.¹¹ Thus, most of the prophecy that the Deutero-Isaiah group had announced before 539—namely, the conquest of Babylon and the liberation of the Judean exiles—was actually fulfilled under Darius, during the dramatic years between 522 and 520.

2. *The First Edition of the Book of Deutero-Isaiah*

During the last decade, four detailed investigations of the redactional history of the book of Deutero-Isaiah have been published, by Reinhard G. Kratz (1991), Jürgen van Oorschot (1993), Ulrich Berges (1998), and Jürgen Werlitz (1999).¹² Although they differ in many details, they agree that we can distinguish mainly between three stages of tradition: first, older material or some kind of an early collection, coming from around 539; second, an early edition dating from around 520; third, a later edition emerging somewhere in the fifth century.¹³ For us, the second stage is of main interest, corresponding to van Oorschot's 'Jerusalem Redaction', Kratz' *Kyros-Ergänzungsschicht*, Berges' *Golaredaktion* and *Erste Jerusalem Redaktion*, and Werlitz' *Buchedition*.¹⁴ I think that Werlitz, who combined a composition- and redactional-critical approach, is right to conclude that the second stage, which contains most of the text of Isa. 40.1–52.12, constitutes the very first book edition. Its entire compositional structure, its tight frame, shaped by a prologue (40.1–5*, 9–11) and an epilogue (52.7–12),¹⁵ its clear division in two sequential parts, a Jacob–Israel

11. Cf. A. Kuhrt, 'Babylonia', in *CAH*, IV, pp. 112–38 (129).

12. See above, n. 5.

13. For more details of the history of research see Albertz, *Die Exilszeit*, pp. 286–92.

14. The datings differ just a little: van Oorschot, *Von Babel zum Zion*, p. 166: 521/20 BCE; Kratz, *Kyros*, p. 191: 'between 520 and 515 or soon after'; Berges, *Das Buch Jesaja*, p. 549: 539–521 and after 521 BCE; Werlitz, *Redaktion und Komposition*, pp. 292–93: the period between 539 and 520 BCE.

15. The first scholar to recognize that Isa. 52.7–12 constitutes the end of the original book was K. Elliger, *Deuterojesaja in seinem Verhältnis zu Tritojesaja* (BWANT, 63; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1933), pp. 266–68. His thesis is now reconfirmed, even if his view that Trito-Isaiah reworked and supplemented the book, adding Isa. 52.13–53.12 and chs. 54–55, has been disproved in the meantime, as it became obvious that Isa. 56–66 cannot be assigned to only one prophetic disciple, but was written by several authors.

and a Zion–Jerusalem part (41–48*; 49.14–52.2*), bridged by the second Ebed-Yhwh Song (49.1–13), and its subdivisions, marked by several short hymns (41.10–12; 44.23; 45.8; 48.20; 49.13; 52.10), was elaborated by an author-redactor, who can be identified as a member of the Deutero-Isaiah group that returned to Jerusalem.¹⁶ In composing his book, he used older texts and collections from the Babylonian preaching period¹⁷ and actualized and supplemented them for the new situation,¹⁸ in which he wanted to promote acceptance of the remigration that now seemed to be possible. This conclusion means that it was not the disappointing events of 539, but the hopeful situation in the first years of Darius, that gave rise to, and shaped, the first edition of the book of Deutero-Isaiah.¹⁹

16. Cf. Werlitz' conclusion in *Redaktion und Komposition*, pp. 319–23. The prophetic disciple and his group are meant by the 'herald' (נִבְיָא), who would bring good news to Jerusalem as the first, mentioned in Isa. 41.27 and 52.7 (pp. 286–88). I agree with Werlitz that the first three Servant Songs and most of the polemics against the idols belonged to the first edition of the book, but I would assign more text to its editor than he did: Isa. 40.1–2, 17–18; 41.8b–9; 42.5–9, 10–13; 43.3b–4(?), 5–7; 44.5, 10–11, 23, 26b α^2 , 28b; 45.1a $\alpha^2\beta$ b, 5, 8, 11a, 12–13b α , 18–19, 24–25; 46.3–5, 12–13; 48.1ab α , 3, 6–7a, 11*, 12–16a, 20–21; 49.5, 8–12, 13, 14–21; 51.4–5, 18; 52.7–10, 11–12. For more details, see Albertz, *Die Exilszeit*, pp. 296–317. The first edition was later supplemented with the fourth Servant Song (Isa. 52.13–53.12). To the second edition of Deutero-Isaiah I would assign: Isa. 40.3a α , 6, 8; 44.24, 26a; 45.9–10, 11a, 13b β ; 47.3–4, 8b–9; 51.1–2, 7–8, 20–23; 52.3; 54.1–12, 14–17a; 55.1–6, 8–13. This was expanded by some smaller later additions.

17. That can be found especially in Isa. 41* and 42.14–45.7*. Isa. 42.14–44.22 probably formed an older collection; see C. Hardmeier, "'Geschwiegen habe ich seit langem... wie eine Gebärende schreie ich jetzt': Zur Komposition und Geschichtstheologie von Jes 42,14–44,23", *Wort und Dienst* 20 (1989), pp. 155–79; Werlitz, *Redaktion und Komposition*, pp. 239–50. The first two Ebed-Yhwh Songs (Isa. 42.1–4; 49.1–4, 6) probably emerged during the years after the disappointing experience of 539 BCE.

18. Apart from the editorial framework of the book, the following texts were probably formulated after the return to Jerusalem (522–521 BCE): Isa. 40.9–11; 42.5–9; 45.11–13*; 48.1–16a*; 49.8–12, 14–21; 51.4–5, 9–10, 17, 19; 52.1–2.

19. Davies, 'God of Cyrus, God of Israel', pp. 216–17, has pointed out that the remigration theme is not so prominent in the book as is often assumed. This is particularly true for Isa. 52.13–53.12 and chs. 54–55, where it is completely absent. Therefore I agree with his later dating to the fifth century with respect to the second edition of the book. However, as the liberation and remigration of the Judaeen exiles constitutes an important objective in the first edition of the book (40.10–11; 42.7; 43.3b–7; 45.13[!]; 48.20f.; 49.6.8–12.14–21; 52.11–12[!]), its earlier dating in a period, just before the first major returns actually happened, remains the better solution. Anyhow, it has to be

In the light of these new redaction-critical insights, we become aware that the experience of failure and delay that the prophetic group had to suffer in 539 and the following years is already reflected in the book. For example, we hear the complaint of the Servant—representing here the prophetic group—that he did not have any success in restoring the tribes of Jacob and bringing back the descendants of Israel (Isa. 49.4, 6a). And in several passages we see the group struggling with the problem that the salvation which they had announced had not yet arrived. For example:

Listen to me, all you 'despaired' hearts,
for whom salvation is far off:
I bring my salvation near, it is not far off,
and my deliverance shall not be delayed;
I will grant deliverance in Zion,
and to Israel my glory.²⁰ (Isa. 46.12-13)

The whole book was intended to be read and heard in the context of how the message of consolation and deliverance spoken by God to the prophetic group during the exile (Isa. 40.1-2) actually survived all internal and external difficulties and finally reached Jerusalem (52.7-10).²¹

Thus we can conclude: if the book can be shown to have been influenced by experiences gained after 539, then we should expect it also to contain references to contemporary political events that prompted the hope that the time of fulfillment had arrived after all and that the return of the exiles was to happen. By these I mean the enthronement of Darius and his policy of repatriation of Judaeans.

acknowledged that not only the Babylonian exiles, but also all other displaced Judaeans in the Persian empire are meant.

20. See also Isa. 42.8-9; 44.21-22; 48.5a, 6-7; 49.8-12; 51.4-5; cf. 55.6; Berges, *Das Buch Jesaja*, p. 338, could demonstrate that those passages that reflect such a delay in salvation do not constitute a separate literary layer, as Hermisson, 'Einheit und Komplexität', pp. 140-41, and van Oorschot, *Von Babel zum Zion*, pp. 197-242, had supposed, but instead penetrate all the stages of the book.

21. In my opinion, K. Baltzer, *Deutero-Jesaja* (KAT, 10.2; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1999), pp. 29-38, exaggerates the dramatic development when he claims that the book of Deutero-Isaiah, taken by him as a literary unit, constitutes a 'liturgical drama', but I agree with him insofar as I suppose that the book was written to be read aloud in public, probably performed by different speakers. The same is true for Lamentations; cf. J. Renkema, *Lamentations* (Historical Commentary on the Old Testament; Leuven: Peeters, 1998), pp. 46-47, who thinks of non-cultic 'gatherings of the Jerusalemites and Judeans who had remained behind' (p. 47) to be their *Sitz im Leben*.

3. The Darius Oracles

In this connection it has to be recalled that according to Kratz the redactional layer, dated around 520 BCE, is heavily occupied with the Persian king once more.²² Hence he calls this layer the *Kyros-Ergänzungsschicht*.²³ On the one hand, this layer can be found in short additions made to the Cyrus oracle in Isa. 44.24–45.7. One of these is the long-winded amplification of its introduction in Isa. 45.1a α ² β b, which tried to reconcile the oracle (v. 2) with the course of history by conceding a non-violent occupation of Babylon; another is in the framing hymn, which was updated by an order that Cyrus should have given for the reconstruction of Jerusalem and the temple (44.28b). On the other hand, the old Cyrus oracle was itself supplemented by a new royal oracle in order to achieve a more concrete message:

Thus says the Lord, Israel's Holy One, his maker...
I alone, I made the earth
and created humanity upon it;
I, with my own hands, stretched out the heavens
and caused all their hosts to shine.

22. Kratz, *Kyros*, pp. 175–92.

23. Kratz, *Kyros*, p. 175, assigned the following texts to it: Isa. 41.1a β (MT), 25a β (MT); 42.5–7; 44.28; 45.1 (from לְבוֹרֶשׁ, 3b (*initium*), 5, 11a, 12–13b α , 18, 22–23; 48.12–15 (16b?); 51.4–5(?); 52.11–12; 55.3–5(?). He argued that the redactor of this layer also introduced the Ebed-Yhwh Songs (p. 175), but this holds true only for the first two (42.1–4; 49.1–6). The main reason why he did not realize that this redactor was likewise responsible for editing the first book of Deutero-Isaiah, is that he did not acknowledge the literary unity of Isa. 42.5–7, vv. 8–9, and of the hymn vv. 10–13, which belongs to the structure of the book. His main argument for assigning Isa. 42.8–9 to a later literary layer is the sudden change into the second person plural at the end of v. 9—‘I let *you* hear’ (p. 128). But this address to the audience (of the Judaeans) constitutes a bridge from the oracle to the following hymn, where the same audience is called on to praise Yhwh (v. 10). Moreover, the last stich of v. 7 would be incomplete without the first stich of v. 8a and could not stand on its own. As can also be seen from the catchwords תְּהַלֵּל (vv. 8, 10, 12), כְּבוֹד (vv. 8, 12), and חֲדָשׁ (vv. 9, 10), the expanded royal oracle, 42.5–9, is clearly bound together with the hymn and therefore integrated into the overarching structure of the first edition. Beside that, Kratz still shares the opinion of his teacher, O.H. Steck, that the early book of Deutero-Isaiah already consists of parts of chs. 54–55 (cf. Kratz, *Kyros*, p. 217, and Steck, *Gottesknecht und Zion*, pp. 125, 170–90); thus he fails to recognize that Isa. 52.7–13 constitutes the end of the original book.

I alone have roused him in righteousness,
and I will smooth his path before him;
It is he who shall rebuild my city
and let my exiles go free... (Isa 45.11a, 12-13a)²⁴

Who is the anonymous person roused by God? Kratz thinks of Cyrus who is mentioned in the oracle before (Isa. 44.28; 45.1); he sees a kind of 'proto-chronicle concept' at work, such as is fully developed in the book of Ezra, that derives all the benefits for the Jewish community from the famous founder of the Persian empire. But the existence of such a theology in the sixth century is highly improbable; the book of Ezra is written about 150 years later.²⁵ If we take into consideration the emphasis used to indicate a very specific person (אִנִּי, 'this one and nobody else'), it seems more likely that the person intended was still alive when the oracle was uttered, and well known by the Judaeans audience. I think that the wording of the oracle has a much clearer meaning, if we identify the anonymous ruler with Darius. Although it had been for a long time unclear after the death of Cyrus who would carry out the liberation of Israel, now, in the year 521, that ruler could be identified: it was no other than Darius, whom—in spite of all rebellions against him—Yhwh had brought on the Persian throne and would prosper for Israel's benefit.

That this is the correct identification can be proved by the next royal oracle in Isa. 48.12-16a, which is likewise anonymous. The chapter has been reworked by a later redactor, but can easily be restored.²⁶ The original

24. The oracle is reworked in Isa. 45.9-10, 11b, 13bβ (see H.J. Hermisson, *Deuterojesaja* [BK, 11.7; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1987], pp. 9-16); in my opinion, this amplification occurred with the second book edition (Albertz, *Die Exilszeit*, p. 322). The original text disputes with the Judaeans, the reworked one with the foreign nations.

25. This 'proto-chronicle concept' of Kratz led him to a later dating, to after 515 BCE, when Darius' rule was established and the idea of a worldwide Persian empire was fully developed (*Kyros*, pp. 185-87). But any dating after 520 or even 515 is difficult, because the book clearly does not presuppose the reconstruction of the temple (cf. Isa. 44.28b; 52.1-2, 11-12).

26. See already Westermann, *Jesaja 40-66*, pp. 157-65; H.-C. Schmitt, 'Prophetie und Schultheologie im Deuterojesajabuch: Beobachtungen zur Redaktionsgeschichte von Jes 40-55', *ZAW* 91 (1979), pp. 43-61 (48-56), and again Werlitz, *Redaktion und Komposition*, pp. 348-56. In reconstructing the text, most scholars differ in minor details only. In 48.1bβ-2, 4-5, 7b, 8b-10, 11*, 17-19, we find a 'school-theological' redaction characterized by some influence of the Deuteronomic tradition, which can probably also be identified in Isa. 42.19, 21, 24bβ; 46.8; 55.7.

text (48.1ab α , 3, 6-7a, 8a, 11*, 12-16a, 20-21) constitutes the final passage of the third subdivision of the Jacob-Israel section (44.24-48.21), which is clearly organized chronologically: After the Cyrus oracle, the announcements of the fall of the Babylonian gods (46.1-2) and of the haughty capital (47*) are reported. At the beginning of ch. 48 not only the exiles, but also Judaeans everywhere, are asked to confirm that Yhwh has 'suddenly' (פֶּתָעִים, v. 3) fulfilled these previous recorded announcements.²⁷ After a long delay, in which most people had given up their hope for salvation, God has surprisingly intervened in history. Against the background of the years 522/1 this request for confirmation acquired a plain meaning: every Jew of the Persian empire could testify that Babylon had actually been recently captured.

On the basis of this now fulfilled prophecy, the Deutero-Isaiah group announced an entire new act of God in history, which their addressees had never heard before (Isa. 48.6b-7a, 8a, 11*). This new act consists of the call of a king who is named by the extraordinary title 'Yhwh loves him' (v. 14a).²⁸ This king, to whom complete success was promised, would execute Yhwh's will in Babylon and his might under the Chaldeans (v. 14b).²⁹ Yhwh's work would be apparent in the centre of power (v. 16a), where the political negotiations and decisions for the benefit of the exiles possibly took place. Since the royal oracle is followed by the request to leave the troubled Babylonian province quickly (48.20-21),³⁰ it becomes

27. The demonstrative pronoun הַזֶּה in Isa. 48.1—'Hear *this*, house of Jacob!'—explicitly refers to the announcements of the previous chapters.

28. Thus MT; the LXX interpreted the passage as a nominal clause 'Yhwh's friend'; only Abraham is honoured with a similar title (Isa. 41.9).

29. Since the clause שְׁלֵם/עֲשֵׂה חֶפְץ (do/fullfil the will of) is used absolutely in other passages (Isa. 44.28; 46.10; cf. 1 Kgs 5.22-23; Isa. 58.13), Kratz (*Kyros*, pp. 124-25) pleaded for interpreting the preposition בְּכַבֵּל a pure local sense: 'Der fragliche Text wäre danach so aufzufassen: "Den Jhwh liebhat (Jhwhs Freund), der wird seinen (Jhwhs) Willen ausführen in Babel und seinen (Jhwhs) Arm in Chaldäa"' (p. 125). Thus Babel and the Chaldeans are not regarded as enemies of Yhwh, but the region from where Yhwh's world government is carried out. Such an interpretation makes sense in a situation where the Neo-Babylonian empire no longer existed; but Babylon, after being captured at the end of 522, constituted the residence of Darius during the first half of the year 521 BCE.

30. Directly, the prophetic group is addressed and instructed to flee from Babylonia and proclaim Israel's deliverance to the whole world, but it is understood as the forerunner of all Israelite emigrants. Isa. 48.22 is a later addition restricting the salvation to the pious, paralleled by Isa. 57.21.

obvious that the appointment of the new ruler aims at the release of the Judean exiles.

The contents of ch. 48, and its position in the book, will make sense only if we identify the ruler with Darius. The appointment of Cyrus *after* the conquest of Babylon had already happened, according to the sequence represented in this section, would make no sense. Moreover, the entire structure of the text, to underline the newness of God's future act, would be superfluous if what was meant was an appointment already made in the past. Thus, only a reference to Darius, who finally fulfilled what was hoped for from Cyrus, allows us to read the chapter in its clear historical sequence and in a way that fits the structure of the whole book.³¹

4. *The Legitimacy of Darius*

How could the Deutero-Isaiah group see Darius as the one appointed by Yhwh, despite the fact that he usurped the Persian throne and his legitimacy was not acknowledged by many subjects of the empire? The answer must be sought on a theological level. Since the prophetic group had announced the fall of Babylon (Isa. 47*), it was, of course, of some importance for them that Darius was the one who actually besieged and captured the city during the autumn and winter of 522. That could easily be interpreted, as we can see also in other contemporary prophetic texts (Hab. 2.13-14; Jer. 51.58), as Yhwh now executing his punishment on the arrogant capital for the cruel policy of the Babylonian empire (Hab. 1.11, 16-17; 2.7, 10, 13, 17; Jer. 51.20-24) and taking his revenge for the destruction of Jerusalem (Jer. 50.28-29; 51.11, 34-37).³² Thus with Darius the era of exile seemed to have come definitively to an end.

31. In the following chapter the message of salvation reached Judah. In Isa. 49.12, the author's perspective shifts from Babylon to Jerusalem; from 49.14 onwards Jerusalem is addressed. Until the end of the book, the prophetic group is occupied with consoling the deserted city and preparing the arrival of the exiles.

32. The large number of oracles against Babylon collected in Jer. 50-51 together with the exilic edition of the book of Habakkuk all testify to the heavy challenge to the Judaeans, that Babylon was not captured and destroyed in 539 BCE. In my opinion, most of these oracles derive from the time after 539 and should function to conjure up the destruction of the proud capital. The last oracle of the collection, Jer. 51.57-58 (paralleled by Hab. 2.13), which announces the destruction of its fortifications, may be uttered in the year of Babylon's first revolt, 522 BCE; cf. Albertz, *Die Exilszeit*, pp. 155-58, 185-91.

But there was another, more important reason. As we can learn from the book of Deutero-Isaiah, the prophetic group discovered an exciting correspondence between its own insights into a new kind of divine world government and the imperial concepts designed by the new Persian king.

In ch. 42 we encounter the strange fact that the first Servant Song (Isa. 42.1-4) is followed by an oracle 42.5-7, which seems to be a commentary on both the first (cf. אֲרֵץ, vv. 4, 5; רִיחַ, vv. 1, 5) and the second Servant Song (cf. לְאֹר גוֹיִם, v. 6; 49.6), yet does not mean the Servant, but a person with a political task: he is called by God in justice to liberate the prisoners worldwide (42.6-7). Hence many scholars have come to the conclusion that in this oracle, in its original form at least, the Persian king Cyrus was meant.³³ But other considerations oppose such an identification. The person is appointed to be אֹר גוֹיִם ('a light to the nations') and בְּרִית עַם (literally, 'a covenant of/for the people'), a phrase that should be rendered 'self-commitment to the benefit of humankind'.³⁴ These functions point in the direction of a more spiritual office, especially as they are otherwise used for Yhwh's Servant (49.6, 8).³⁵

The solution to this problem, which is long disputed,³⁶ will become much easier if we think of Darius rather than Cyrus. With respect to Darius, the cryptic phrase אֹר גוֹיִם makes sense, because Darius, perhaps moved by the rebellions against him, proclaimed that he wanted to base his imperial policy on the foundation of דִּין, that is, 'law' and 'truth'.³⁷ This means that the king committed himself to the law and was willing to concede to his foreign subjects more rights of their own, as can be seen later in his tax orders for the Persian empire. The overlap in the characteristics of Darius and the Servant can be easily explained if we assume that the Deutero-Isaiah prophets wanted explicitly to parallel Darius' and the Servant's

33. So, among others, K. Elliger, *Deuterjesaja*. I. *Jesaja 40,1–45,7* (BK, 11.1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978), pp. 227-40; Kratz, *Kyros*, pp. 130-31; Berges, *Das Buch Jesaja*, p. 344.

34. As can be seen from Isa. 42.5b, the term עַם does not denote Israel here, but has the meaning 'population of the earth', that is, 'humankind'.

35. Thus several scholars identify the appointee of Isa. 42.5-7 with the Servant; cf. Duham, *Jesaja*, pp. 313-14; Westermann, *Jesaja 40–66*, pp. 81-83; van Oorschot, *Von Babel zum Zion*, p. 232.

36. See Werlitz, *Redaktion und Komposition*, pp. 277-81; Westermann, *Jesaja 40–66*, p. 81, stated that '42,5-9 gehört zu den noch nicht wirklich erklärten Perikopen des Deuterjesaja-Buches'. I hope a sufficient explanation is found now.

37. See his inscription in Behistun, §8, in O. Kaiser (ed.), *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments* (Gütersloh: Güterloher Verlagshaus/Gerd Mohn, 1984), III/1, p. 424.

office.³⁸ Reflecting the sense of Israel's continued exilic existence, which did not come to an end in 539, the prophetic disciples came to the new insight that Yhwh had appointed Israel—and that means, primarily themselves as the forerunners of the people—to transfer the law (מִשְׁפָּט, הוֹרָה) supporting the weak to all nations. In that they saw a new kind of divine worldwide government no longer based on power and subjugation but on law and justice. And Israel, or the prophetic disciples, were appointed by him to offer all the nations an orientation ('light for the nations') for their own benefit (Isa. 49.6).

With this new concept of God's rule in mind, the Deutero-Isaiah group must have been deeply impressed by the political programme proclaimed by Darius. Interpreting his political propaganda in an idealistic manner, they could not understand this coincidence other than that Yhwh himself had brought this usurper to the Persian throne, because he wanted to start with him this new kind of law-based government. Therefore they were sure that he would have some sympathy with the displaced minorities of his empire and could be willing to bring them back to their previous homes (Isa. 42.7). He would be interested in resettling also the exiled Judeans and restoring the ruined temple of Jerusalem and the devastated Judean towns (45.12-13), so as to win their loyalty. In their view, nobody other than Darius could be the legitimate king of the empire, explicitly appointed by Yhwh. By this amazing turn in the course of history Yhwh had demonstrated his sovereignty once again (42.8-9). Hence the prophetic disciples called all Judeans (cf. 'you', vv. 9, 10) and all people in the remotest areas of the empire to praise Yhwh (vv. 10-12), because he would use all his power to support Darius in his fight against the enemies of the new world order (v. 13).

Thus the identification of the king appointed in the oracles of Isa. 42.5-7, 45.11-13*, and 48.12-16a with Darius is not only possible but also solves longstanding exegetical problems and provides a much more concrete understanding of the message proclaimed by the first edition of the book of Deutero-Isaiah, immediately before the remigration from Babylonia began.

38. That the passages Isa. 42.5-13 and 48.1-16a*, 20-21, point to the same event is confirmed by the fact that both underline the newness of God's intervention (42.9, 10// 48.6-7a, 8a) and the fact that the statement in 42.8bα is cited again in 48.11b. The close parallels between Isa. 42.1-13 and ch. 48* are already noted by H. Leene, 'Auf der Suche nach einem redaktionskritischen Modell für Jesaja 40-55', *ThLZ* 121 (1996), pp. 804-18 (815-16), without drawing any historical conclusions.

